

Washington Service Corps’ Roadmap to Civic Engagement “Crash Course”

The new program year is here and once again we have the opportunity to participate in the *Roadmap to Civic Engagement* curriculum. Some teams are old hands, while others are just starting their Civic Engagement journey. The “Crash Course” is a way to refresh and orientate all teams within the WSC. This year the Roadmap has been revised and new manuals are being distributed. Please use the new manuals that incorporated your feedback and recycle the old ones. While the curriculum can be slightly adapted for age and group differences if necessary, it is essential to the integrity of the curriculum to keep the stated activity goals in mind.

The “Crash Course” contains tools, resources, and insights that can assist you and your team as you experience the curriculum and then go out and engage local youth.

Please remember to send your CE monthly report in so we can support your successful implementation of the *Roadmap*.



Please send in your CE stories and photographs!

Washington State
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The “Why?” of Civic Engagement

Why did WSC become involved with the Civic Engagement Program?

After September 11, 2001, President Bush issued a call to action, requesting citizens around the country to get involved in their communities, to make a difference, to improve the lives of the people around them. The *Roadmap to Civic Engagement* program was the Washington Service Corps’ reply to that call. With the development of this program, Washington Service Corps is on the forefront of a series of new national initiatives to increase civic participation and knowledge in this country. More than that, it is our chance to pass on to the youth we serve our passion for service and the knowledge that each of us can make a difference in the world in which we live.

Why the Roadmap?

As part of the new AmeriCorps guidelines, each service program is required to provide training for their members that will help them “acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for active civic engagement.” Washington Service Corps collaborated with Service Learning Northwest at ESD 112 to develop the *Roadmap to Civic Engagement* curriculum to meet this guideline. This type of training, in which members facilitate the program with youth, enables the WSC to double its impact. Not only does the facilitation reinforce the training for AmeriCorps members, it also extends the reach of civic engagement education to include hundreds of youth, thereby maximizing the benefit to the community. In short, the *Roadmap* has allowed the WSC to turn a member training objective into a unique program that addresses one of the most pressing needs of youth today: civic engagement.

What is the Roadmap to Civic Engagement?

The *Roadmap to Civic Engagement* is a curriculum designed to teach both members and youth about the values, history, and actions that have shaped our country and continue to shape it today. More than that, it is an opportunity to empower youth to become part of that process themselves by developing and carrying out a community service project, thereby fostering in them a sense of the value of actively participating in both our communities and our democracy.

The *Roadmap* contains 7 units, each 90 minutes long (although each unit can also be split into two 45-minute units if there are time constraints.)

- **Unit 1:** Creates a sense of unity among the participants through ice breakers, developing a group name, group t-shirts, and discussion of how to make the meeting area a “safe place.”
- **Unit 2:** Introduces youth to local history and some basic ideas about why we have rules and laws and how they can be changed. Youth begin to learn that regular people can make a difference.
- **Between Unit 2 and Unit 3:** Optional exploratory service project.

- **Unit 3:** Focuses on the community, its assets and needs. It is in Unit 3 that youth begin to think about and discuss the community needs that will form the basis for their service project.
- **Unit 4:** “Needs Unit.” Shows the connection between basic human needs and issues in the community such as homelessness, pollution etc. It also introduces the idea that the youth can affect these issues and invites them to think about needs they would like to address in their service project.
- **Unit 5:** Shows the power that one person can make both through historical examples and games. In the second half, youth discuss and vote upon the need that they want to meet.
- **Unit 6:** Youth decide how they will address the need that they chose. If the need or issue at stake is hunger, will they hold a food drive? Will they spend a day at a soup kitchen? Will they write letters to local stores asking them to donate food?
- **Between Unit 6 and 7:** Youth and AmeriCorps members carry out their service project.
- **Unit 7:** Youth reflect upon their experience and celebrate their accomplishments.

The *Roadmap* provides an interactive process through which youth learn about their community, understand its needs, decide how to address those needs, and do so through a community service project. Participants begin to see themselves as change agents capable of affecting the world around them and positively impacting their community. By incorporating elements of history, government, reading, and writing, as well as reflection, the *Roadmap* ensures that youth are learning while, at the same time, meeting a genuine community need. This type of “service-learning” has been shown to be a highly effective education tool with lasting impacts on its participants. *The Roadmap to Civic Engagement* is a unique and powerful program, and we appreciate teams actively taking a part in this extraordinary learning opportunity.

Why experience the *Roadmap* as a team first?

Each team will have the opportunity to complete the curriculum and a project together before facilitating the *Roadmap* with local youth. Why is this important? The answer stems from the service-learning aspect of the project. People learn by doing and this is a great way to accomplish that goal. Team supervisors and members can be exposed to the entire curriculum and figure out what works best for each unit. Depending on the team, individual members can also strengthen their facilitation skills. Doing this project as a team first is a great way to build team unity and increase member skills!



CYS CE Project

Why not just do a service project with youth?

Although the very process of performing a service project can have strong effects on participants, a service-learning approach generates more profound and long-lasting effects. Service-learning is a teaching methodology that incorporates community service and reflection into academic learning. It is a very effective method of teaching in part because it is experiential, but also because it requires that *youth choose their own service project* and that *this service project meets a genuine community need*.

When youth are able to choose their own topic and are doing something that truly benefits the community, they are more motivated and interested in the subject matter. Not only are they learning valuable information about their government, community, and history, but they are seeing how these things are relevant in their lives through serving in their community and reflecting upon their experience. For this reason, service-learning has the power to make these subjects come alive for students and ignite within them a real passion for civic learning that extends well beyond their service project.

Because service-learning is a process, rather than a one-time experience, youth have a chance to learn much more, make deeper connections, and experience greater impact by placing their service experience in a broader context. Service-learning through the *Roadmap* program empowers the youth to become change agents while instilling in them the kind of knowledge and desire necessary to continue their active participation in democracy for the rest of their lives.



EarthCorps CE Youth Project

Why is this geared towards middle school youth?

Both WSC and the designers of the *Roadmap*, Service-Learning Northwest, believe that the middle school grades (6-8) offer the best time to introduce the concepts of civic engagement. Research shows that the middle school years are foundational years for grasping this sort of data. Youth in these grades are young enough to have an open mind about the subject matter but old enough to understand the concepts. While high school students could definitely benefit from this type of program, it may be harder to get them to buy in—many of their civic engagement attitudes have already been shaped. Conversely, elementary-aged youth can enjoy the games and the service project, but many of the concepts might be above their level. Middle school is a very tumultuous (as we all know) and formative time. Hence, these years are a great window of opportunity to impact youth.